



Critical tips for critical conversations

The fear of an angry or emotional reaction is why so many managers avoid having difficult conversations with employees. Instead, they hope matters will just resolve themselves. However, they usually don't. In fact, they're likely to get worse. So the sooner productivity or behavioral issues are confronted, the sooner they can be resolved.

Here are some tips to help you address a difficult or sensitive issue with a member of your team:

1. **Be prepared.** Begin by gathering all the pertinent information and facts. Consult with HR to ensure you fully understand company policies and procedures, your rights and the employee's rights. Your internal policies and procedures should give you a framework for any action you intend to take.
2. **Practice active listening.** This includes:
 - Maintaining eye contact
 - Smiling and nodding when appropriate
 - Keeping an attentive posture
 - Paraphrasing and asking relevant questions to help clarify what the other person has said
 - Acknowledging your counterpart's perspective
 - Not interrupting
3. **Remain calm, respectful and focused on the issue.** If the conversation starts to veer off-track or the other person becomes angry, upset or hostile, agree to meet again and/or seek support from HR.

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4. **Use “I” not “you” language.** Starting your sentences with “I” avoids judgment and blame and diffuses defensiveness. For example, instead of “You never have your sales report ready” say, “I cannot meet our departmental targets without timely sales reports.”
5. **Together, agree to a plan for going forward and schedule a follow up meeting.**
6. **Thank the other person for listening and/or understanding.** This ends the conversation on a respectful, positive note.

For more information and support on how to approach a difficult situation, **contact us**.

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Recognizing a job well done to keep employees motivated

Studies have shown that when employees feel appreciated, respected and valued, they are more motivated and engaged. And a motivated, engaged workforce means:

- Higher productivity
- Increased innovation and creativity
- Improved customer service
- Greater morale
- Reduced absenteeism
- Less turnover

Many organizations invest a great deal of time and money into formal employee recognition awards and events, yet a 2016 U.S. survey found that 82 percent of workers feel they are not recognized enough for the contributions that they make.

However, there is one thing that does work – and it costs nothing: feeling appreciated by one's direct manager. Here are some tips to help make members of your team feel valued:

- **Understand your employees.** What works for one group may not for another. Who makes up your team? Are they mostly younger, older, male, female? Do they prefer formal rewards, private acknowledgements or public recognition? Ask your team what they would like.
- **Recognize, support and mentor every day.** Don't wait for formal company recognition events or performance reviews to tell your employee they're doing a great job.
- **Check in with people regularly.** Ask employees how they're doing, what's going on in their lives and offer support as much as possible.
- **Demonstrate fairness and consistency.**
- **If you hear a positive comment about one of your team members, let them know.** Write a personal thank you note or email and, in cases of exceptional effort, c.c. HR or a member of the senior leadership team.
- **Encourage feedback.** Ask your team what processes work and what needs improvement. Let them know you are always available to discuss new ideas, tackle problems and offer advice.
- **Publicly acknowledge** an employee's idea or accomplishments at staff, interdepartmental and senior leadership meetings.

Recognition should be part of your team's daily routine. For more ideas on how you can create a positive team dynamic and **contact us**.

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